



# National Landscape Conservation System

*Great American Landscapes - Healthy, Wild and Open*

## A Strategic Plan for Colorado

**June 13, 2007**

**FINAL**

## **Introduction**

### **Background**

The Bureau of Land Management is the steward for many of the great American landscapes. These special places have helped shape the character and heritage of our nation and of many people through the ages. The National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS) consists of designated lands with special resource, scientific and cultural importance. The System is managed by the BLM as an American treasure of vast, wide-open spaces. The purpose of the System is to increase the public's awareness of and appreciation for these public land treasures, and to focus more management attention and resources on these areas.

In Colorado, NLCS units include a National Monument (NM), two National Conservation Areas (NCAs), Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs), and National Trails. The BLM's management of NLCS areas needs to set the highest standard for protecting landscapes, applying evolving knowledge and social standards, and bringing people together in harmony with the long-term health of the land.

## **What Makes NLCS Areas Special?**

NLCS areas are unique portions of public lands and are designated by the President or by Congress. These area designations supplement the multiple-use mandate of the Federal Land Management Policy Act (FLMPA) and provide more specific guidance for resource management and protection of the area's nationally significant values. Because these areas are special, Congress and the public expect NLCS units to be managed to a higher standard.

While this Strategy applies broadly to all Colorado NLCS areas, it specifically addresses management of the Monument and two National Conservation Areas in Colorado.

NCA's and Monuments:

- are established as unique units with separate, stand alone Resource Management Plans (RMPs) and in some cases, such as McInnis Canyons NCA and Canyons of the Ancients NM, include mandated Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) advisory groups;
- showcase the application of best management practices;
- are withdrawn from mineral entry or limit new leases;
- have proclamation or legislative language to protect specific values, including: geologic, scenic, paleontologic, scientific, cultural resources, motorized and non-motorized recreation, wildlife, and Threatened and Endangered species habitat;
- have specific proclamation or legislative language related to travel management, with mechanized and motorized use limited to designated routes or specific Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) areas;
- emphasize conservation with a mandate to manage the landscapes as "healthy, wild, and open;"
- are directed under the NLCS Science Strategy to be managed as outdoor laboratories and living landscapes for scientific research, restoration projects and education;
- combine nationally significant resources with traditional local uses, including grazing, energy exploration and development, hunting, etc;
- are mandated to implement community stewardship and partnerships;
- are expected to enhance economic development of local and regional economies.

## Vision/Mission

The mission of the National Landscape Conservation System is to conserve, protect, and restore nationally significant landscapes with outstanding cultural, ecological, and scientific values for the benefit of current and future generations.

## NLCS Goals

- **Balanced Management:** Manage NLCS units for compatible uses, valid existing rights and the values for which the area was designated.
- **Stewardship:** Educate the public to promote the health and productivity of ecosystems on public lands. Build community relationships to foster collaborative stewardship of NLCS lands.
- **Education:** Use public land resources to promote life-long learning for all users to explore and discover these special areas.
- **Community:** Build and strengthen community relationships to foster collaborative stewardship through opportunities for individuals to “experience” the outdoors and invest in their surroundings.
- **Partnerships:** Expand partnerships to increase effectiveness and maximize use of resources.
- **Conservation:** Commit to conserving, protecting and restoring special landscape values as directed in the BLM organic act (FLPMA) and demonstrate BLM’s capability to excel at managing these special areas.

## Guiding Principles

- Safeguard the character of NLCS resources and protect the special values of these landscapes.
- Support and encourage scientific study within NLCS resources, yet assure that research methodologies are carefully reviewed to ensure compliance with BLM's responsibility to preserve and protect resources in these areas.
- Continue existing uses as directed in each area's enabling legislation or proclamation (i.e. pre-existing authorizations, valid existing rights, or activities such as hunting, fishing, or grazing) in a manner which assures such uses will be managed to protect the special values of these landscapes.
- In order to prevent impacts to NLCS resources, BLM should accommodate undeveloped recreation use as long as no significant impacts to the area's resources occur; utilize limits on large groups and commercial uses; and when needed, limit the numbers of individuals allowed to visit certain areas.
- Whenever possible, locate developed recreation and interpretive facilities outside of NLCS area boundaries. If no reasonable alternative exists then such facilities shall be compatible with the purposes for which the area was established.
- NLCS areas will be designated closed to the cross-country use of off highway vehicles unless such use is expressly authorized by proclamation or legislation.
- Use opportunities to educate and advocate greater appreciation for BLM lands in general, as well as the NLCS units.
- Work with tribes, local, state, and federal government partners, as well as scientists and the public, to develop and refine management practices to achieve these guiding principles.

## **Objective 1: Communications, Public Awareness, and Marketing**

**Improve internal and external information sharing and enhance the awareness and identity of the NLCS in Colorado. At the state level, coordinate NLCS websites, brochures, maps, and other recreation information to ensure consistency in messages and content.**

**Rationale:** *Improved communication will facilitate the public's sense of ownership and appreciation of the Colorado NLCS units. An established communication network will result in enhanced internal and external program coordination.*

### **External Strategies:**

- At the state level, develop an external communications plan to open channels among national, regional, state and local interest groups.
- Develop a Colorado NLCS communications toolkit (brochure, fact sheets, postcards, posters, videos) that highlights all NCAs, monument(s) Wildernesses, National Trails, etc. and provide specific user information about each area.
- Create a strong and consistent visual identity for Colorado NLCS areas through signage, information and marketing campaigns.
- Create a Colorado NLCS web page that provides news and updates on issues and accomplishments.

### **Internal Strategies:**

- Complete an annual report to highlight success stories and share monitoring information with the general public.
- At the state level, develop an internal communications plan to enhance information sharing within BLM Colorado, and nationally, regarding Colorado NLCS units
- Develop and implement a comprehensive sign, map, and brochure program, in coordination with the BLM-wide identity/image strategy and work plan.

## Objective 2: Interpretation and Education

**Enhance efforts to educate visitors, local communities and individuals about the relevance of NLCS resources to their lives, and to engage citizens in learning about and sustaining the health and productivity of these landscapes. Develop education, interpretation and outreach programs and materials to explain landscape health issues, special values, and protection strategies and highlight management successes within NLCS units.**

**Rationale:** *Successful natural and cultural resource management depends on citizen stewardship and cooperation. Educating communities and individuals is an integral part of NLCS management and critical to ensuring sustained, long-term resource conservation.*

### External Strategies:

- Link NLCS science program activities to education, interpretation activities, outreach efforts and national BLM projects.
  - Example: the Science Web Portal
- Incorporate interpretation, education and service-related elements in visitor surveys to monitor success of programs.
- Provide Web site links to related educational and interpretive sites.
- Incorporate outdoor ethics and stewardship program principles into interpretation and education media, brochures, maps, etc.
  - Example: principles of *Tread Lightly!*, *Stay the Trail*, and *Leave No Trace*
- Provide the public web access to accepted economic studies models that document the local, regional, and national benefits of NLCS-related management and activities.

### Internal Strategies:

- Identify existing national, state and local partnerships to leverage financial and personnel resources and to broaden public awareness of the NLCS.
- Develop interpretive plans and outreach materials for all NLCS units to highlight each area's unique cultural, paleontological historical, geological and resources.
  - Examples: brochures, oral histories, school curriculum, videos
- Establish a clearing house of currently available, relevant education and interpretation products.

### **Objective 3: Visitor Services & Safety**

**Promote safe and appropriate public access and foster visitor enjoyment, appreciation, and learning opportunities to provide for enriching and inspiring experiences.**

**Rationale:** *Improving information services fosters positive visitor experiences, connects people to their natural and cultural resources, and promotes resource stewardship.*

#### **Visitor Services Strategies:**

- Increase visitor contact with agency personnel, resource patrols and visitor information available to improve voluntary compliance with rules and regulations and to reduce illegal activities. Employ, where appropriate, the use of non-law-enforcement personnel to help achieve regulatory compliance and resource protection.
- Maintain the current law enforcement Ranger program to maintain a focus on the diverse public uses within the NLCS management areas. By teaming with County Sheriff's and using a combination of public education and management tactics, the number of illegal incidents can be reduced.
- Train front-line workers in providing user information about NLCS units and communicating the NLCS's importance to BLM, local communities, and all public land users.
- Improve signing, mapping, and travel information and education for NLCS visitors.
- Ensure all facilities (restrooms, kiosks, trailheads, signs, etc.) are clean and well maintained.
- Conduct periodic visitor use and satisfaction surveys to monitor visitation, enhance recreation experiences, and protect resources.
- Improve on-the-ground maintenance programs to sustain and enhance visitor access and safety.
- Complete accessibility evaluations (as required) at all major recreation and visitor facilities and enter baseline data into the Accessibility Data Management System (ADMS).
- Complete action plans and funding strategies for corrective actions identified in ADMS.
- Coordinate with BLM engineering staff to conduct recreation-site and facility-condition assessments and ensure that funding is directed to the highest priority site and facilities.

#### **Visitor Safety Strategies:**

- Meet public health standards and complete needed improvements to critical public drinking water and sewer systems.
- Ensure that visitor safety issues are identified and addressed. Utilize existing safety management components from other BLM programs to the extent possible.



- Provide safety training for employees and volunteers with field public contact responsibilities. Focus training on risk management and hazard/safety awareness.
- Develop a monitoring strategy to detect illegal activities and establish action plans that will reduce or eliminate inappropriate activity.

## **Objective 4: Sustainable Funding and Staffing**

**Provide sustainable funding and staffing necessary to appropriately manage NLCS units in Colorado. Recognize that NLCS units are to be managed differently as directed by legislation and proclamation and require additional management attention and fiscal resources.**

**Rationale:** *Local and national constituencies who support the special designations of these areas expect them to be managed at a higher standard than other BLM lands. A variety of creative and new funding sources need to be explored in addition to targeting appropriated funds. The potential exists to do much more than currently is being accomplished.*

### **External Strategies:**

- **Work with local special interest groups on creative partnershiping endeavors to supplement BLM resources with volunteers devoted to these areas.**
- Explore opportunities to increase revenues under Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act.
- Continue leveraging funds through place-based partnerships, including Friends Groups, Cooperating Associations, counties, etc., to utilize external revenue streams, as well as volunteer resources.
- Seek ways to minimize financial impacts on other BLM offices by working more proactively with potential external funding sources, including the National Trust, Colorado Natural Heritage Program, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, endowments, etc.
- With public affairs, develop and conduct field trips to educate the public, key decision makers, and the media about the importance of protecting Colorado NLCS areas, and inspire individuals to participate constructively in increasing support for these areas.

### **Internal Strategies:**

- **Identify adequate core staff, specialist support, skill mix, and base operating costs needed to meet our legal mandates, achieve “high level” standards and implement RMPs, Wilderness plans, etc.**
- **Define high standards of management in cultural, natural, wilderness, recreation and paleontological resource stewardship, protection, and restoration and how these standards can be met.**
- **Develop an internal, state-wide approach to NLCS funding.**
- **Fund partnership development and maintenance costs within base to ensure the continuance of partnerships.**
- Advocate NLCS theme for national budget allocation and priority setting.
- Utilize internal funding opportunities, including revenue, reimbursable accounts, construction and deferred maintenance funding, etc.

- Continue to share staff specialists with field offices and explore new ways to jointly fund other needed positions between NLCS units.
- Implement and showcase examples of best management practices, cooperative conservation and restoration projects that have wider landscape-level applicability and demonstrate accomplishment of strategic performance goals to justify higher funding levels.

## Objective 5: Partnerships

**Build and sustain community relationships to foster cooperative conservation and community stewardship. Ensure that maintaining partnerships is a top priority throughout NLCS areas**

**Rationale:** *The NLCS units provide high-profile partnership opportunities because of their special designation and highly valued resources. NLCS units are helpful in fostering potential relationships. However, the interest from the public and opportunities for cooperative conservation far exceed our current capacity to handle those opportunities. We could do even more if we can increase our capacity to maintain relationships and manage the opportunities.*

### Strategies:

- Tap into external revenue and administrative sources through developing and enhancing partnerships with Friends Groups and cooperating associations to assist with development, funding, and implementation of collaborative activities.
- Complete an annual report, highlighting success stories and translating internal tracking and databases for the general public. Showcase projects and efforts that illustrate conservation, protection, and restoration successes.
- Increase capacity for managing volunteers, partners, outside funding sources, and relationships by increasing skills internally and using skills available in the community.
- Engage academia more in the development of Best Management Practices, restoration projects, and in seeking cooperative research funding (*see research and science objectives*).
- Shift employees' skills and priority workload to integrate community relationships and partnerships in day-to-day business.
- Increase volunteer support and community stewardship by diversifying opportunities and creating innovative partnerships on NLCS lands. Emphasize that public involvement is critical to ensuring that NLCS resources exist for future generations.
- Work proactively with the State Office to streamline the agreements process.
- Develop collaborative relationships emphasizing sustainable practices with the tourism industry and gateway communities.
- Showcase how BLM Colorado recruits and maintains partnerships.
- Continue supporting special outreach projects as well as major state and national initiatives, including National Public Lands Day, National Trails Day, etc.
- Establish partnerships with local law enforcement through reimbursable agreements to provide highly visible patrols within the NLCS units, and to assist BLM law enforcement Rangers.

## Objective 6: Conservation and Restoration

**Commit to conserving, protecting, and restoring special values within Colorado NLCS units. Prioritize maintaining the healthy, wild, and open character of the landscapes.**

**Rationale:** *NLCS was conceived to protect some of the most remarkable wild landscapes found in the West. Colorado NLCS units include many of BLM's most spectacular lands and water containing unique scenic, biological, cultural, and wilderness values. Guided by FLPMA and each area's enabling legislation, our NLCS units present a unique opportunity to showcase how we balance our multiple uses with resource conservation, protection, and restoration, and instill within the public a better awareness, appreciation, and active stewardship of these special places and BLM's legacy.*

### Strategies:

- Showcase projects and efforts that demonstrate conservation, protection, and restoration successes, and illustrate their connection to BLM Strategic Goals for Resource Use and Protection.
- Initiate comprehensive, cost-effective inventory and monitoring programs in NLCS units to identify critical resources, unique values, sensitive areas, and to track trends and changes in resource condition and overall successes and lessons learned in achieving resource management objectives. Ensure activities comply with BLM's National Monitoring Strategy.
- Include monitoring in the base workload in order to comply with legislative and proclamation mandates, address problems, and implement adaptive management and proactively share plans, methods, and results both internally and externally.
- Emphasize protection or restoration of native species within their historic ranges, with particular attention to key wildlife, plant species, and cultural resources specified in proclamations and enabling legislation.
- Develop and implement comprehensive weed-management programs for NLCS units.
  - Examples: complete weed inventories, develop cooperative weed management plans and treatment projects, leverage funding
- Complete Landscape Health Assessments (LHAs) and improve landscape health within NLCS units by incorporating landscape health objectives into RMPs and activities.
  - Examples: could incorporate objectives into recreation and transportation management, cultural resources, grazing, permitting land use activities.
- Develop GIS data layers and maps for key resources in easy-to-interpret formats to facilitate unit level assessments, decision making, and internal and external information sharing.
- Develop education, interpretation, and outreach programs and materials to explain landscape health issues, special values, and protection strategies, and showcase management successes within NLCS units.

- Develop partnerships, collaborative projects or activities that result in specific conservation and restoration benefits.
- Ensure that law enforcement monitoring and enforcement activities place high emphasis on protecting a unit's special resources and make substantial progress towards eliminating or mitigating threats to those values.

## **Objective 7: Proactive Research and Applied Science**

**Foster and promote scientific research and acquire a better understanding of how to manage landscapes and significant resource values within NLCS units in a manner that uses a best science approach with adaptive management strategies.**

**Rationale:** *NLCS units were designated in part for their extraordinary scientific resources, the wealth of knowledge that can be obtained from them, and their outstanding opportunities for public outreach and education. Encouraging natural and social-science research and applied science projects in our units further fulfills BLM's multiple-use mandate and legislative or proclamation requirements. Managers must be proactive in working with science providers to ensure research conducted is applicable to our legal mandates and adaptive management objectives, and that study methodologies and best management practices derived from this work are transferable to other BLM-managed lands.*

### **In compliance with the NLCS Science Strategy:**

- Develop unit-specific science plans that identify and guide the unit's scientific mission and efforts. Specifically address gaps in the data needed to support land use plan implementation priorities. These gaps can serve as a basis for soliciting science providers and funding as well as a way to highlight accomplishments.
- Use the BLM Science Web Portal to inform science providers of research opportunities, track activities, and monitor research work to ensure it complies with laws, regulations, and land use plan decisions.
- Develop and initiate outreach programs with educational institutions and local communities to communicate needs, successes, as well as research and applied science opportunities helping an effort to maintain high interest within the science community and public land visitors.
- Link NLCS science program activities to education, interpretive activities, outreach efforts and national BLM projects, such as the Science Web Portal.
- Identify resources and funding needed to implement the science strategy, include these needs into the base workload, and fund the science strategy.
- Disseminate scientific information (research protocols, best management practices, adaptive management strategies, etc.) to other BLM resource managers to ensure broad benefit from research conducted on NLCS units.
- Designate a science coordinator for each unit as the contact for science providers submitting research requests through the BLM Science Web Portal.
- Develop on-the-ground laboratories (learning landscapes, living classrooms, etc.) and science study areas for each unit.

## **Objective 8: Enhance Recreation Opportunities**

**Provide outstanding recreational settings and opportunities for visitors and residents that allow them to explore, learn about, appreciate, feel connected to, and derive targeted physical and social benefits and desired outcomes from these special areas. At the state level, coordinate NLCS websites, brochures, maps, and other recreation information to ensure consistency in messages and content.**

**Rationale:** *Colorado NLCS units are a unique and important part of the West's "backyard" in that they provide unparalleled recreational opportunities for world travelers and local residents in spectacular wild and open natural landscapes. As showcases for BLM, recreation in Colorado's NLCS units must be managed in ways which enhance user experiences and sustain unique settings and character while delivering benefits and outcomes most beneficial and complimentary to users, local communities and the area's special resources.*

### **Strategies:**

- Implement Colorado's Recreation Strategy objectives to ensure sustainable production of high quality recreation experiences and quality of life outcomes for individuals, communities, economies and the environment.
- Develop, maintain, and nurture sustainable travel/tourism partnerships with Gateway communities to ensure accurate and beneficial marketing of NLCS recreation opportunities.
- Make completing travel management planning and implementation a top priority for NLCS units.
- Identify specific and distinct recreational opportunities, experiences and benefits to be derived from each of the NLCS units in Colorado, and highlight them in marketing products.
- Develop comprehensive recreation visitation and economic impact measurements (user surveys, site inventories), and monitoring and reporting program(s) applicable to all NLCS units.
- Develop and implement signage plans that incorporate NLCS signing mandates and consistent and clear user information.



## Objective 9: Ongoing Multiple Use Mission

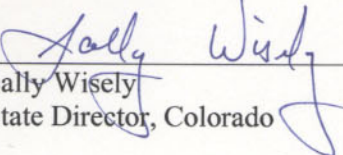
**Continue to manage compatible uses and valid existing rights consistent with protection of the values for which each area was designated. Highlight opportunities to protect critical resources within the context of continued multiple-use activities.**

**Rationale:** *Designation of areas within the NLCS system requires protection of certain values as prescribed in the legislation or the proclamation, but does not remove the areas from the overall multiple-use guidance of FLPMA. Valid existing rights that predate the designation still must be honored as legally necessary, while protecting the values to the extent that legal discretion allows. Other uses that do not conflict with the protection of the values can also continue to occur. For example, grazing is not limited by most NLCS designations, nor is hunting, other forms of recreation, wildlife management, and other compatible uses. Even designated wilderness areas continue to be managed to allow many of these multiple uses.*

### Strategies:

- Highlight opportunities to protect critical resources within the context of continued multiple-use activities.
- Maintain interdisciplinary team involvement in the management of each unit to assure a full mix of resource management as appropriate for the area.
- Assure adequate across-the-board funding to support the necessary interdisciplinary management.
- Highlight multiple-use management in interpretive exhibits as a way of demonstrating the overall BLM mission, and the NLCS contribution to it.
  - Example: explain the need for valid existing rights to be exercised where this is an issue that the public needs to understand such as existing oil and gas leases.
- Continue to provide direction for multiple-use management of areas through resource management planning and implementation for each area.

### Approved By

  
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Date